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WHY THE SHORT-WAR SCENARIO IS WRONG FOR NAVAL PLANNING.(U)
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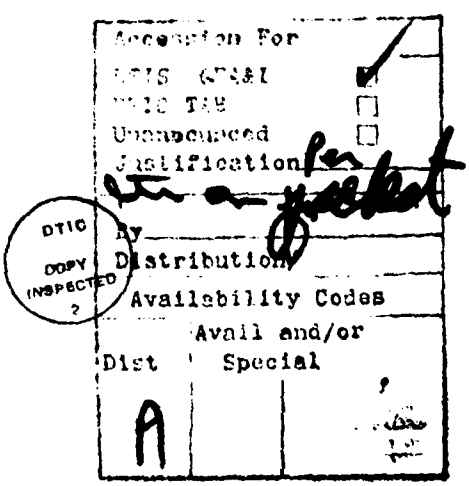

WHY THE SHORT-WAR SCENARIO IS WRONG FOR NAVAL PLANNING

Is it sensible to plan U.S. naval forces for a short war with the USSR? This paper argues that the answer is a firm, clear "no." The discussion focuses on conflict duration. Other important elements of planning, such as Soviet goals and strategy and the roles of nuclear weapons, are posited but not analyzed.

The U.S. Government's force-planning scenarios have tended to describe conflict in terms of geography, the objectives, strategies, and resources of the antagonists, and the duration of each level of violence. As widely noted in the press, academic circles, and official statements, a European war scenario has dominated our planning since the end of World War II. The phases of such a conflict are expected to be short. The essential phases are often described as (1) a brief period of warning, followed by (2) a Soviet attack on the central front, with conventional forces, leading to (3) either quick victory for the Soviets or rapid escalation to nuclear war.

General-purpose naval forces play a limited role in this "short war" scenario. The U.S. Navy is usually assumed to:

- Defend the sea lines of communications (SLOCs) to ensure the flow of reinforcements and resupply to Europe and to U.S. forces in the Pacific.

- Strike with carrier battle groups at Soviet forces on NATO's flanks or even in the territory of Warsaw Pact nations. The objectives are to keep Greece, Turkey, and Norway in the war, thus preventing greater Soviet concentration on the central front, and to engage the Soviet Navy as close to its bases as possible.

But serious problems may reduce the impact of the Navy's carrier strikes. The amount of ordnance they can deliver is limited by the number of carriers available. The linkage is difficult to establish between the Navy's strikes and the course of the war elsewhere. The short duration of the war may preclude the cumulative effects of maritime operations from reaching a strategically significant level. And the strikes must be made within range of Soviet bomber bases at a time when Soviet Naval Aviation is at full strength and can attack the battle groups.

Noting these problems, the Navy's critics have tended to argue that:

- The Navy should emphasize forces for SLOC defense: frigates, maritime patrol aircraft, attack submarines, mines, and surveillance systems.

- Carriers and amphibious forces would have no significant role; the war would be too short.

- Large surface ships are a dubious investment because they would not be useful for SLOC defense and would be vulnerable to modern weapons if they operated on the flanks or near the USSR.

The Navy has tried to defend its forces and programs in a short-war context. But maritime forces need time in order to have strategic effect, and the Navy's explanations of its roles in a short war have not silenced its critics. Instead, the Navy should attack the root problem, which is that the short-war model is wrong for planning naval forces.

Our theses are that:

- A short war, whether worldwide or confined to Europe, is an inappropriate basis for planning naval forces.

- There are other scenarios that are more likely and, from a naval viewpoint, more demanding. They offer a more realistic basis for planning naval forces.

- These scenarios call for a Navy oriented toward force projection and mobile sea control, but also containing enough SLOC defenses to permit static sea-control operations if needed.

WAR IN EUROPE: HOW IS IT RELATED TO PLANNING THE U.S. NAVY?

Should the Security of Europe Continue To Be a Central Concern in U.S. Navy Force Planning?

Western Europe is not the only focus of our security interests. These interests also encompass Persian Gulf oil, the vast economic and military structure of the Pacific nations, and events in the Caribbean. But the fact is that we would be far less secure if Western Europe were dominated by the USSR, since we would lose wealthy allies with substantial military forces while the Soviets would add enormous economic potential to their war machine.

There are other good reasons why we have focused on preparations for a war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The Soviets might be willing to take substantial risks to acquire Western Europe. They no doubt covet its wealth, and the proximity and size of Warsaw Pact forces pose an obvious threat. Conquest of West Germany would give the Soviets

total control over a nation which has damaged them in the past and which they still perceive as a threat.

For our part, it is important to recognize that our NATO allies, above all else, do not want another war on their territory. They believe the best way to deter the USSR is to link attack in Europe to thermonuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. But the Soviet drive toward nuclear parity has made this strategy increasingly unattractive to the United States and forced us to consider alternatives.

The Short-War Assumption

If there are good reasons to plan for war in Europe there are also reasons--not very good ones from the U.S. viewpoint--why many have supposed the war would be short. The prevailing judgment has been that a Soviet blitzkrieg could probably drive across Germany, take Denmark and the Netherlands, and reach the Channel. That outcome has been assumed to represent victory for the USSR, and therefore the "end of the problem." NATO might be forced to use nuclear weapons in a desperate attempt to stop the Soviet advance. But it has generally been assumed that, if nuclear weapons were used on the European battlefield, the conflict would quickly escalate at least to intercontinental counterforce if not to all-out nuclear war. That would again be the end of the problem in the eyes of many people.

The reasons for trying to deter an attack on Western Europe remain valid. But from the viewpoint of the United States, the argument that a Soviet blitzkrieg would lead to a short war never held water and is even less cogent today. The fallacies of this argument are outlined in the next subsection.

What Would be the Course of a War in Europe?

The two main issues are:

- Would the conflict escalate to strategic nuclear war?
- Would the Alliance continue military resistance after the Pact's advance stopped?

There are two reasons to think a European war would not escalate to an all-out nuclear exchange. First, the approximate parity of U.S. and Soviet strategic forces makes it unlikely that either side would initiate nuclear war. Second, as Soviet strategic forces have been moving toward parity with ours, their military thinking has been moving toward a doctrine in which protracted conventional conflict is a preferred and increasingly feasible option. No longer are the Soviets adamant that escalation to nuclear conflict would be "inevitable" in the event of war with the West.

Thus, we must look beyond the traditional "end of the problem" and ask ourselves what would happen if the Soviets invaded Western Europe and nuclear war did not follow. The answer is that the United States should expect to face a long, difficult, conventional struggle.

If the allies continued to resist, an updated version of World War II would ensue, with all that implies for the diversity and extent of naval operations. Rapid depletion of land-based forces, as in the 1973 Mideast War, could make sea-based projection forces more important.

On the other hand, if the Soviets subjugated our allies, the United States would be left to pursue its interests with no help from Europe. It would be difficult to find a satisfactory way to terminate the conflict. Soviet pressure would certainly continue worldwide. Again, the demand for naval forces would be high. In this case there would be time to generate national power, but the standing forces would have to include essential items that take a long time to produce.

But what if strategic nuclear war did occur, despite the dictates of reason and the movement of Soviet doctrine toward a conventional option? The answer is uncertain, but we must reckon with some distinct possibilities:

- There is no certainty that organized national effort would end. Strategic war could be followed by a period of reconstitution.

- Reconstitution would require a period of years--perhaps many years. And it probably would not be accompanied by "peace." Desultory nuclear strikes and other types of military action could go on indefinitely.

- Destruction of the superpowers would mean a great relative increase in the strength of hostile powers such as Cuba and Vietnam.

- General-purpose forces could well be essential to survival in this period. In fact, the United States should expect military threats to its survival until significant national power is regenerated. A wide variety of Navy and Marine Corps operations might be needed.

- The bulk of national power would have to be recreated over a period of time. Residual forces would have to include essential items that the country could not quickly produce after a nuclear war. Naval forces, by their nature, would be more likely than others to survive in significant numbers.

Summary

Europe remains important to our security. But the traditional reasons for believing in a "short war" have never been sound ones from the U.S. viewpoint. If a war occurred in Europe, then no matter what course the war followed, the United States could expect to find itself involved in a long struggle in which general-purpose naval forces would be vital. The major possibilities seem to be:

- Avoidance of nuclear war coupled with continued NATO resistance, leading to a long conventional war;
- Avoidance of nuclear war and collapse of European resistance, leading to a world in which the United States would have to pursue its interests without European allies;
- Escalation to nuclear war, followed by a long and dangerous period of reconstitution during which naval forces could be essential to the survival of the United States as a nation.

In each case, there would be time to generate national power. But the standing forces (and planned residual forces) should include essential items that otherwise might require years to produce.

WHAT IF THERE IS NEVER ANOTHER WAR IN EUROPE?

The main issue in this case is: does the USSR have a strategy to dominate Europe and continue its expansion by means other than direct attack? And if so, does Soviet strategy involve "diplomacy of force?" We may hope the answer to at least one of these questions is "no." But the evidence does not point that way.

If we are faced with an indirect strategy that may include the use of force at opportune times, then we will continue the political/economic/military struggle that entered its current phase when the Soviets developed thermonuclear weapons. From the U.S. Navy's point of view, the world will be characterized by:

- Continued deterrence of war in Europe
- A continuing requirement for deployment of U.S. forces to promote stability in the Third World
- Contingencies involving the military forces of non-NATO, non-Warsaw Pact nations
- Evolution of Soviet naval and other projection forces. The Soviet diplomacy of force specifically aims to "bind the hands of the imperialists" to prevent them from using military and naval forces for political purposes.

- Evolution of the sea control forces of other nations.

This is the situation CNA examined in the so-called Non-NATO Contingency Study (NNCS). Major conclusions of the NNCS were:

- The Navy needs highly capable forces to deal with the full range of crises and limited conflicts (including those involving or potentially involving the Soviets).

- In several warfare areas, the capabilities needed for crises and limited conflicts differ significantly from the corresponding capabilities required for general war.

- Some of the important planning for naval operations in peacetime, crisis, and limited conflict lies entirely outside the scope of preparation for general war.

In general, the NNCS suggested that capabilities for mobile sea control and force projection are essential to the U.S. Navy in the world as it is and will probably continue to be, in the absence of a war in Europe. The study also suggested there are many important naval warfare scenarios that remain to be examined, entirely outside the scope of the traditional European war scenario.

CONCLUSION

We can't expect to design a proper Navy for the future, or correctly assess the one we have today, without examining the full range of circumstances under which the Navy would be important to the country. Unfortunately, the short-war scenario that evolved after World War II was mistaken for a description of the war for which we should prepare all our forces. Thus, the "full range of circumstances" referred to above has been only partially described and studied. Examination of the logical possibilities shows that if war in Europe is avoided, we can expect an increasingly turbulent world of crises and limited conflicts, many (most?) of which could involve Soviet forces. On the other hand, if war occurs in Europe, the struggle will not be a short one for the United States, no matter how it develops. We will be regrouping after a nuclear exchange, or fighting a modern version of World War II, or stepping into the unknown against a much stronger enemy after the loss of our European allies.

The future Navy will operate in one or more of these general scenarios. Even though such scenarios are partly an exercise in imagination, we should try to delineate them further and analyze their requirements as best we can.

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